
LESSON 1

OVERVIEW: OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR

Introduction

Purpose	This lesson will help you, the Marine Corps officer, become familiar with the joint planning process at the operational level of war.
Importance of the Study	Regarding planning and executing at the operational level, the Marine Corps and joint doctrine have both similarities and differences. These are important to become aware of and remember.
Relationship to Other Lessons	This lesson presents an overview of the operational level of war. You will see that the strategic and operational levels of war are so closely connected that strategic directions and decisions do determine operational objectives. In turn, operational objectives are linked to tactical actions and the achievement of the overall strategic objectives of the campaign. The remaining lessons in this course will build on the concepts and relationships among concepts introduced in this lesson.
Background	The operational level of war is the realm of joint warfighting. The Commander in Chief (CINC) evaluates the strategic direction from the National Command Authority (NCA) and translates it into a theater strategy with clearly defined objectives. At this level, the CINC uses operational art to achieve strategic and operational objectives. This lesson introduces you to the concepts and definitions used in the study of the operational level of war.
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 2 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Considerations of Employing Forces	From the perspective of linking strategic direction with operational objectives, summarize the doctrinal planning considerations of employing joint and multinational forces at the operational level of war. [JPME Area 3a]
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Plan to Employ Forces	Develop an ability to begin to broadly plan for employment of joint forces at the operational level of war. [JPME Area 3c]
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Relationships Among Levels of War	Summarize the relationships among the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. [JPME Area 3e]
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Relationship Between Service and Joint Doctrines	Summarize the relationship between service doctrine and joint doctrine. [JPME Area 2d]
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JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	2/d/.25 3/a/.25 3/c/.25 3/e/.25
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Marine Operations

Joint Warfare Today, the American way of war at the operational level is defined as *joint warfare*. The Marine Corps fills a major role in deliberate and crisis response planning conducted by the NCA and the CINCs. For this reason, Marines must understand the Marine Corps philosophy on campaign planning and how the Corps can contribute to the planning and execution of operations across the full spectrum of warfare.

Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan The Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) provides planning guidance to the combatant commanders and the Chief of the Services to accomplish tasks and missions based on current military capabilities.

Fundamentals of Campaign Plans The fundamentals of campaign plans include the following:

- Incorporate the combatant commander's strategic intent and operational focus.
- Provide broad strategic concepts of operations and sustainment for achieving strategic objectives.
- Achieve unity of effort.
- Establish the organization of subordinate forces and designate command relationships.
- Provide subordinates strategic direction as well as operational focus, including major tasks, objectives, and concepts.
- Provide an orderly schedule of decisions.
- Serve as the basis for subordinate planning and clearly define what constitutes success, including conflict termination objectives and potential posthostilities.

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Marine Operations, Continued

Marine Corps Campaigning

Marines are most familiar with the tactical level of war. It is the Marine tradition to attack aggressively to defeat enemy forces. Marines must be aware, however, that tactical success alone does not guarantee success in war. Defeating the enemy in combat cannot be viewed as an end in itself, but rather must be considered a means to a larger end--accomplishment of the NCA's strategic objectives.

Required Reading

Joint Pub Readings

Joint Pub 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (1995). Read chapter 1; chapter 2, pp. II-1 to II-5; Chapter III, pp. III-1 to III-4; and Appendix A. Find this reading in the *Joint Pub Readings* Vol. I (8800), pp. 297 to 330 and pp. 395 to 397. Chapter 1 discusses the link between national security strategy and the supporting military strategy. The reading from Chapter II introduces joint operations, focusing on the levels of war and providing an overview of operational art. Chapter III provides a macro view of joint doctrine for planning joint operations, covering the link between national strategy, combatant command strategy, and the CINC's strategic estimate.

MCDP 1-2, *Campaigning*

MCDP 1-2, *Campaigning* (1997). Read chapter I, pp. 1-20. This selection complements Joint Pub 3-0 and provides you with the Marine Corps perspective on the operational level of war.

Issues for Consideration

Relationship	Recognize the relationship between national strategic direction and combatant command strategies.
National Security Strategy	Analyze how national security strategy is executed terms of the relationship between joint doctrine and service doctrine.
Combatant Command Strategies	Summarize the role of combatant command strategic planning during peacetime and describe the importance of the strategic estimate in this planning.
Unified Action	Explain how the concept of unified action relates to joint operations.
Levels of War	Compare and contrast the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war and discuss the relationships among them.
Perspectives	Compare and contrast the Marine Corps' perspective on the operational level of war with the joint perspective.